



MONTEREY BAY AQUARIUM

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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SPECTACULAR JELLIES, SCHOOLS OF ANCHOVIES BRIGHTEN AQUARIUM AS LIVING ‘HOLIDAY LIGHTS’

The seasonal “holiday lights” displays so popular at zoos and aquariums nationwide now have a living counterpart drifting and swimming in four exhibits at the Monterey Bay Aquarium. Among the new arrivals: spectacular spotted comb jellies that have only been exhibited once before at any aquarium worldwide; beautiful Australian spotted jellies; and two sparkling new schools of anchovies.

The delicate spotted comb jellies (*Leucothea pulchra*), considered to be among the most dazzling of all comb jelly species, were recently collected in Monterey Bay and added to the award-winning *Jellies: Living Art* special exhibition. They were first exhibited here in 2002 – the only other time they’ve been displayed outside the wild anywhere in the world.

They join another resplendent species: the Australian spotted jelly (*Phyllorhiza punctata*), striking because of a pale sapphire bell that’s patterned with tiny silvery-white dots. Unlike the spotted comb jellies that were collected in the wild, the Australian spotted jellies were raised behind the scenes by staff biologists from animals sent to Monterey by colleagues with Zoo-Aquarium Berlin.

In addition to the two species of fragile drifters, thousands of silvery anchovies are schooling, darting and sparkling in the aquarium’s three-story Kelp Forest exhibit, and above visitors’ heads in a 15,000-gallon oval exhibit at the entrance to the Outer Bay galleries.

The highlight for visitors will be the spotted comb jellies, which drew international attention—including a featured spot on the *CBS Evening News*—when they were first placed on exhibit three years ago.

“They’re absolutely amazing animals,” said Senior Aquarist Bruce Upton, whose efforts led to the initial success in November 2002. “It’s great to have them back.”

“They’re incredibly beautiful, incredibly complex and incredibly fragile,” said Dr. George

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Matsumoto, education and research specialist at the independent Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute (MBARI), who studied the species for his Ph.D. thesis.

Leucothea pulchra—which means “beautiful white spectacle”—is a shallow-water species found only in the Pacific Ocean between Central California and the Sea of Cortez, and only during late fall and winter months. Distinctive brownish-orange spots cover this ctenophore’s (TEEN-oh-fore) translucent body; scientists are as yet unsure of their function.

Like all comb jellies, it creates flashing patterns of rainbow light when white light is diffracted as it passes through the pulsing ctene-rows (TEEN-rows) that help the jelly move through the water.

Marine scientists have long been fascinated not only with the spotted comb jelly’s other-worldly looks, but also with its complex feeding and propulsion behaviors.

“It is the only ctenophore to travel using jet propulsion, and the only one that can ‘fly’ underwater,” Matsumoto said. “They can curl their oral lobes and squirt water between them at very high velocity. They can also slowly flap the lobes, producing power strokes to generate forward motion.”

The spotted jelly is also unusual because it can gather food in three distinctly different ways. An adult spotted comb jelly swims horizontally with its large oral lobes open like wide doors to funnel food inside. It can also manipulate food using its four worm-like auricles, which it waves around like antennae. As a juvenile, the spotted comb jelly can also gather food using two trailing tentacles.

The Australian spotted jellies, as their name implies, are native to the Indo-Pacific region. For all their beauty, they have become an invasive species in the Gulf of Mexico, off San Diego and in other regions worldwide—likely when they were carried in the ballast water of oceangoing freighters.

The jellies, anchovies, and all other exhibits are included with aquarium admission of \$21.95 adult; \$19.95 senior (65+); \$17.95 student (13-17 or college ID); and \$10.95 child (3-12) and disabled. The aquarium is open daily from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., and during major holiday periods from 9:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Visit www.montereybayaquarium.org for more information, or call 831-648-4888.

The mission of the nonprofit Monterey Bay Aquarium is to inspire conservation of the oceans.